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**BLOOD OF THINGS**  
**ALFRED KREYMBORG**

*BOOKS BY ALFRED KREYMBORG*

MOODS AND STUDIES (Out of print)

APOSTROPHES (Out of print)

ERNA VITEK, A Novel

MUSHROOMS

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

BLOOD OF THINGS

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS (In preparation)

*Editor of the New Verse Anthologies,*

OTHERS, FOR 1916

OTHERS, FOR 1917

OTHERS, FOR 1919

# BLOOD OF THINGS

*A Second Book of Free Forms*

BY

ALFRED KREYMBORG

Author of "Mushrooms," "Plays for  
Poem-Mimes," etc.

NICHOLAS L. BROWN  
NEW YORK MCMXX

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Poems in this volume have appeared in the following periodicals, to which the author makes his acknowledgment:

THE BOOKMAN  
BRUNO CHAP BOOKS  
CARTOONS  
THE CATHOLIC ANTHOLOGY  
THE CRISIS  
THE DIAL  
THE FREE SPIRIT  
THE LITTLE REVIEW  
THE MODERN SCHOOL  
THE NEW REPUBLIC  
THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE  
OTHERS  
PLAYBOY  
POETRY, A MAGAZINE OF VERSE  
THE POETRY JOURNAL  
THE POETRY REVIEW OF AMERICA  
THE SEVEN ARTS

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AUG 12 1920



To  
DOROTHY KREYMBORG



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**BLOOD OF THINGS**

**ALFRED KREYMBORG**





# BLOOD OF THINGS

A SECOND BOOK OF FREE FORMS

## TÊTE-Â-TÊTE

In the whither of you,  
there are deathless things,  
some foolish,  
some fine,  
I might beckon you to? —

I'm bone and flesh,  
blood and brain  
of a sort for a start? —  
with an instrument,  
you can see and hear,  
I stroke  
to a sort of a start? —

I'm groping my way? —  
seeking my self? —  
yes! — but —  
I might prove the  
way to finding you? —

accidentally touch  
 some phrase in my riddle,  
 solving you  
 though it doesn't solve me? —

No? — but —  
 listen to me —  
 going to you!

### CLAVICHORD

If you stand where I stand —  
 in my boudoir —  
 (don't mind my shaving —  
 I can't afford a barber) —  
 you can see into her boudoir —  
 you can see milady —  
 her back, her green smock, the bench she loves —  
 her hair always down in the morning —  
 black, and nearly as long as the curtains —  
 with ringlets at the tips —  
 the hairdresser called this A. M. —  
 him I have to, I want to afford.  
 Unhappily, you can't see her face —  
 only the back of her small round head —  
 and a glint of her ears, two glints —  
 but her hands, alas, not her hands, though  
 happily, you can hear them.

It isn't a clavichord —  
only a satinwood square —  
bought cheap at an auction —  
but it might be, you'd think it,  
a clavichord, bequeathed by the past —  
it sounds quite like feathers.  
Bach? Yes, who else could that be —  
whom else would you have in the morning —  
with the sun and milady?  
Grave? Yes, but so is the sun —  
not always? No, but please don't ponder —  
listen, hear the theme —  
hear it dig into the earth of harmonies.  
A dissonance? No, it's only a stone —  
which powders into particles with the rest.  
Now follow the theme —  
down, down, into the soil —  
calling, evoking the spirit of birth —  
you hear those new tones —  
that sprinkle, that burst —  
roulade and arpeggio?  
Gently now, firmly —  
with solemn persuasion —  
hiding a whimsic raillery —  
(does a dead king raise his forefinger?) —  
though they would, though they might —  
no phrase can escape —  
the theme rules.  
Unhappy? No,

they ought to be happy —  
each is because of, in spite of, the other —  
that is democracy —  
he can't spare a particle —  
that priest of the morning sun.  
A mistake? Yes indeed, but —  
all the more human —  
would you have her drum like a schoolmaster —  
abominable right note at the right time —  
in the morning, so early —  
or ever at all? —  
she'll play it again —  
oh don't, please don't clap —  
you'll disturb them!  
Here, try my tobacco —  
good, a deep pipeful, eh? —  
an aromatic blend —  
my other extravagance —  
yes, I'll join you, but wait —  
I must first dry my face!

## MIDNIGHT CAPRICE

Prisoner there,  
I would bring you —  
what is it? —  
what shall I call it? —  
no, midnight between us,

scarce any feeling can find you.

Ah, I have a light in me —

where is the light in me? —

and you have a light in you —

haven't you a light in you? —

but the corridor —

where is the corridor? —

however I call or you yearn,

is there a corridor?

I could sneak you a thought —

would the gaoler see a thought? —

which might reach — what is it? —

the chink in you?

Even so —

what thought has a body,

knees, arms, hands, a mouth? —

has thought a body, can thought touch

thought? —

nor can I find the chink in me —

have I a chink in me?

Prisoner there,

sing you to yourself,

sing I to myself —

this be our courtship!

Nay, I came from the cell

of a woman once —

she had a light in her —

she had a corridor —

she sneaked me out to me —

was the gaoler away?  
Even so —  
what body has a thought  
to remember that? —  
or how it was done? —  
and how to do it again? —  
were I mother to myself,  
could I do it? —  
ah! were I mother to myself,  
and you father to yourself —  
is that our corridor?  
Prisoner there — look —  
can you see from where you are? —  
have you a sorrow? —  
is that your sorrow,  
silver hood and silver cloak,  
dainty hands and dainty feet,  
dancing a slow step with mine? —  
what a happy movement now! —  
one can fairly hear a gigue!  
Or has that fop of a moon —  
come through a flimsy cloud —  
like a rider through a hoop —  
for another caprice with the stars? —  
foppery courts frippery?  
Even so,  
cannot ever sorrows meet?

## PEBBLE, SONG AND WATER FALL

Have you a religion,  
a philosophy,  
a theory or two or three? —  
bring them out here —  
a bath in this air won't hurt them —  
or you can keep them in your pockets —  
nobody here for you to show them to,  
for you and your thought to be doubted by —  
and scatter them at the last  
(you may find them useless?)  
down the mountain slope —  
poke them with a stick  
and watch them slide  
over strange soil and past stranger surroundings,  
only to bounce and skip and twirl and fly —  
(fancy the joy they'd have,  
pent up as they were back East!)  
then to nestle out of sight,  
beyond all argumentation!  
Have you no religion,  
no philosophy,  
no theory or two or three? —  
you can pick them up,  
have them for the mere stooping,  
or break them, pluck them pleasantly —  
Indian paint-brush,

baby-blue-eyes,  
forget-me-not,  
the yellow monkey-weed —  
dizzier climbing  
(like a bug up the side of a wall!)  
will give you clouds of wild lilac,  
or wild clematis,  
or a spray of the manzanita,  
so named by the race of Fray Junipero!  
Or come and steal a bird song —  
(the mocking bird will teach you how!)  
or don't steal it —  
let them play on you,  
(so many snatches the birds have here!)  
let them start innocent counterpoint  
with the aid of the wood-choir falls,  
these water falls  
the high snow and higher sun  
contrive with the aid of the chance of the day!  
Pebble, song, or water fall,  
pebble, song, or water fall —  
which one will you choose? —  
(why not have them all?)  
there's only the sky —  
and this is a sky, Brother,  
this great Sierra sky,  
big and round and blue,  
meeting the horizon wherever you stare —  
there's only this sky



to see what you do or don't do —  
(it doesn't spy!)  
and these trees! These trees? —  
out here they're so still and so silent,  
you'd fancy them dead —  
they don't even whisper a ghostly phrase —  
and if they have thoughts,  
(like the folk back East!)  
they have a way of sharing them  
without polluting the air with conjecture —  
and there's no wind to carry their gossip,  
if of a sudden they gossiped a trifle!  
Let us go —  
you and I —  
with creeds —  
without creeds —  
or with and without —  
the mountains out here —  
these gray Sierra elephants —  
you can crawl up their sides —  
and from high broad shoulder to higher and  
highest —  
(if there is a highest?)  
they won't shrug you off —  
not that they're docile —  
they simply don't care!  
Nevertheless and notwithstanding,  
for the sake of imbroglia —  
suppose we gave them a tickle or two

right through their hides to a rib or two? —  
 (elephants must have a rib somewhere?)  
 and suppose they did mind and did shrug us off?  
 Pebble, song, or water fall —  
 which one would you choose  
 for toppling and sliding and bouncing  
 and skipping and twirling and flying? —  
 (fancy the joy we'd have,  
 pent up as we were back East!)  
 but why not have all three? —  
 pebble, song, *and* water fall,  
 pebble, song, *and* water fall —  
 then to nestle out of sight,  
 beyond all argumentation!  
 Come on, Brother!  
 But wait!  
 One moment!  
 Don't forget to bring your humility!

## NUN SNOW:

### A PANTOMIME OF BEADS

#### *Earth Voice*

Is she  
 thoughtless of life,  
 a lover of imminent death,  
 Nun Snow

touching her strings of white beads?  
Is it her unseen hands  
which urge the beads to tremble?  
Does Nun Snow,  
aware of the death she must die alone,  
away from the nuns  
of the green beads,  
of the ochre and brown,  
of the purple and black —  
does she improvise  
along those soundless strings  
in the worldly hope  
that the answering, friendly tune,  
the faithful, folk-like miracle,  
will shine in a moment or two?

*Moon Voice*

Or peradventure,  
are the beads merely wayward,  
on an evening so soft,  
and One Wind  
is so gentle a mesmerist  
as he draws them and her with his hand?

*Earth Voice*

Was it Full Moon,  
who contrives tales of this order,  
and himself loves the heroine,  
Nun Snow —

*Wind Voice*

Do you see his beads courting hers? —  
lascivious monk! —

*Earth Voice*

Was it Full Moon,  
slyly innocent of guile,  
propounder of sorrowless whimses,  
who breathed that suspicion?  
Is it One Wind,  
the wily, scholarly pedant —  
is it he who retorts —

*Wind Voice*

Like olden allegros  
in olden sonatas,  
all tales have two themes,  
*she is beautiful,*  
*he is beautiful,*  
with the traditional movement,  
*their beads court each other,*  
revealing a cadence as fatally true  
as the sum which follows a one-plus-one —  
so, why inquire further?  
Nay, inquire further,  
deduce it your fashion!  
Nun Snow,  
as you say,  
touches her strings of white beads,  
Full Moon,

let you add,  
his lute of yellow strings;  
and, Our Night  
is square, nay,  
Our Night  
is round, nay,  
Our Night  
is a blue balcony —  
and therewith close your inquisition!

*Earth Voice*

Who urged the beads to tremble?  
They're still now!  
Fallen, or cast over me!  
Nun, Moon and Wind are gone!  
Are they betraying her? —

*Moon Voice*

Ask our Night —

*Earth Voice*

Did the miracle appear? —

*Moon Voice*

Ask Our Night,  
merely a child on a balcony,  
letting down her hair and  
black beads, a glissando —  
ask her what she means,  
dropping the curtain so soon!

## ZOOLOGY

### SYLLOGISM

Love is an old dog  
who is faithful  
to his master heritage.  
Even when Life,  
that old house cat,  
scratches him,  
he returns to the hearth —  
his tail down,  
but his tail wagging.  
On rare occasion,  
she lets him sleep near her —  
in the coal bin.

### PARRAKEETS

If you don't put two in a cage,  
parrakeets die.  
Please put two in a cage,  
whoever you are?

### OWLS

Blue Sky  
opens one eye at a time ;  
but it sees in a wink

more than your two in their eternity.  
Is his other eye closed? —  
yes, but it sees  
what even the owls cannot see:  
Chinese parasols  
spread out ere mid-day!  
If you had an open eye  
and a closed eye,  
an open which closes,  
a closed which opens,  
you would see  
all your twin eyes are blind to:  
born one after the other,  
they might see  
day and night,  
now and then,  
love and love,  
meet at last!

## CAMELS

I have water of my own  
to take me towards the horizon!  
But there are oases wide away,  
and a beckoning image of camels!

I love myself,  
but I love them more —  
though they change to trees,  
though they change to trees!

Let the sand of Sahara spread my shroud,  
 and the wisdom of Arabs sneer epitaph —  
 “ Camel love never agrees,  
 camel love changes to trees! ” —  
 I'll follow even the last mirage!

## WORMS

I was once as free as you,  
 I was once as young as you;  
 sand to me, a sweet pure food,  
 life to me, one oozy slime;  
 for I was once as long as you,  
 longer far than most of you:  
 now I'm only two short worms —  
 worms you couldn't call me.

Living two lives, never one,  
 two small lives, each more than one,  
 we so twain, a twain remain,  
 twain of one and one of twain.  
 Treacherous day, a sunny day,  
 sunniest day that ever I knew,  
 a thing crawled near, cut me in two,  
 I that once was long like you.

## ROBINS

He did the best he could.  
 With what he was.  
 Towards love that came.



Now,  
this not-yet-old young man  
pecks at love,  
eyeing it,  
touching it,  
dropping it,  
eyeing it,  
like a wary robin  
with a wriggling worm.

## DUCKLINGS

Oh wise-eyed duck,  
waddling like an empress,  
tell me:  
Would you be more happy  
or less happy  
or not at all happy  
if you had  
twelve ducklings,  
or ten ducklings,  
instead of eleven ducklings,  
quacking you dumb?

## ROACHES

You, sir,  
you they call a man:  
you blow smut against her?  
Ordinarily,  
I'm such a shameless softie,

my shoe-leather squirms squashing a roach;  
 but I'd enjoy,  
 though it choke me with creeps  
 and stain me with blood  
 (if such have blood to bleed):  
 you, sir,  
 I'd enjoy castrating.

## PRIMER

Why does the man flay the horse?  
 If he is late again,  
 the boss will discharge him.

Why does the boss flay the man?  
 If trade won't improve,  
 his wife will be grumpy.

Why does the wife flay the boss?  
 If she wears that hat much longer,  
 the neighbors will sneer.

See the man flay the horse!

## HEN-BEING

Being cooped in a crate,  
 cooped in a crate,  
 as one is cooped in crates  
 on West South Water Street  
 of the filthy, stinking Chicago River —

being cooped in a crate  
with more hens than a crate can hold,  
is not an existence,  
even for hens,  
but it gives one a sense of safety,  
monotony, warmth and interest  
I don't deplore.  
What I deplore  
is this being yanked by the neck,  
yanked by the neck,  
yanked by the neck,  
and being flung,  
crammed and damned  
by a common, filthy, stinking  
West South Water Street poultryman  
of the filthy, stinking Chicago River,  
from one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another.  
It's enough to make  
an old hen squawk,  
and I'm an old hen, if you please,  
a roosterless, eggless, chickenless hen!  
There's ever the hope in a hen like me  
that the next crate  
will be one's last,  
so that this being slammed  
from one crate to another,  
one crate to another,

one crate to another,  
will reach a cadence.  
I'm an old hen, if you please,  
a roosterless, eggless, chickenless,  
and I can endure  
filthy, stinking West South Water Street  
of the filthy, stinking Chicago River  
of the filthy, stinking Loop of Chicago, Illinois,  
but wring my neck ere my time  
if I don't squawk truth for all hens  
when I affirm that this  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
one crate to another,  
is no hop forward  
but a hop backward from  
being cooped in a crate,  
cooped in a crate.  
Being cooped in a crate,  
a hen might find something to scratch,  
though it's only one's neighbor,  
and one is sans claws,  
sans even a feather,  
to scratch her with!  
Oh, Poultry Man,  
you are truly  
the God of hens!

## GEOMETRY

Never a mouse  
chases ever a tail,  
never a mouse ever sees  
that always a cat  
catches always a mouse,  
cats being kittens  
who once chased their tails:  
Toss a pebble  
into a stream,  
never a circle  
catches a circle;  
shoot a dawn-ball  
into the sky,  
never a moonbeam  
catches a sun;  
drop the same thought  
on the floor,  
only a kitten  
catches a tail,  
the tail being straight,  
the kitten a circle:  
Yet never a mouse  
chases ever a tail,  
never a mouse ever sees  
that always some death  
catches always his mouse,

deaths being kittens  
who once chased their tails.

## RHYMES

We birds —  
we hop —  
and then peck and coo —  
humans keep their feet on the ground!

We bulls and cows —  
we lick —  
and then lap and moo —  
humans keep their tongues in their cheeks!

Pooh —  
but they  
have still much to learn  
about loosening!

## ARIAS AND ARIETTES

### SERENATA

Your brain is a garret  
scurrying with gray mice  
(mice that were white ere dust touched them gray)  
seeking the cheese  
you removed from your cupboard.

(I am wrong, as usual.)

Your brain is a tower  
clamoring with birds  
(such a whirring of wings, the color is blurred)  
mocking the discordant choral  
you used to try on your clavier.

(I am wrong, as usual.)

Your brain is a wintry wood on a hill  
looking afar in the solitude  
and hearkening the song  
(is it snow or a breeze?)  
the vast silence  
essays with numbed breathing.

(I am wrong, as usual.)

Your brain is a balcony —  
isn't it a balcony  
waiting for hands below  
to bring their crooked veins into tune?

And I the troubadour  
 who can twang you back to the garden?  
 (Or am I wrong, as usual?)

## VALSE

Softly —  
 yes, that is her patter in the hall;  
 she has returned.

Eagerly —  
 yes, that is her form in the door;  
 she is here.

Madly —  
 yes, these are her arms;  
 this mouth is hers.

Tenderly —  
 yes, these are her eyes;  
 her eyes are these.

She loves me; she loves me still —  
 and a little more!

## GRASSES

Who  
 would decry  
 instruments —  
 when grasses,



ever so fragile,  
provide strings  
stout enough for  
insect moods  
to glide up and down  
in glissandos  
of toes along wires  
or finger-tips on zithers —  
    though  
    the mere sounds  
    be theirs, not ours —  
    theirs, not ours,  
    the first inspiration —  
    discord  
    without resolution —  
who  
would decry  
being loved,  
when even such tinkling  
comes of the loving?

## TIGER-LILY

To have reached  
the ultimate top  
of the stalk,  
single, tall, fragile;  
to hang like a bell,  
through sheer weight  
of oneself,

rather than pride of  
it being the top,  
no higher to go,  
rather than modesty  
of it being  
only a stalk,  
one among myriads ;  
to have one's six petals,  
refusing the straight  
for the curve,  
dipping mere pin-pricks  
around the horizon ;  
to have six tongues,  
which, however the mood  
of the wind may blow,  
refuse to clap into sound ;  
and to keep, withal,  
one's finest marvel,  
one's passionate specks,  
invisible :  
tiger-lily,  
if I bow,  
it is not  
in imitation ;  
it is  
in recognition  
of true being.

## HARVEST DIRGE

Why do you hearken so, ears of corn?  
Wheat, you beckon your yellow to me?

*Come, sir, she's coming, sir.*

*Come, sir, she's come.*

Why do you go away, cloud, like a hearse?  
Remove your gold spectacles, stream, and weep?

*Come, sir, she's going, sir.*

*Come, sir, she's gone.*

## ROUNDELAY

The rain comes,  
the worm comes,  
the foot comes —  
    and thus it goes,  
    and thus it goes —

The sun comes,  
the rose comes,  
the hand comes —  
    and thus it goes,  
    and thus it goes —

Rose to worm,  
hand to foot,  
five feet apart —  
    and thus it goes,  
    and thus it goes —

The wind breathes,  
the two return,  
dust, to the sky —  
    and thus it goes,  
    and thus it goes —

## INDIAN SKY

The old squaw  
is one  
with the old stone behind her.  
Both have squatted there —  
ask mesa,  
or mountain, how long?  
The bowl she holds —  
clay shawl of her art,  
clay ritual of her faith —  
is one  
with the thought of the past,  
and one with the now,  
though dim, a little old, strange.  
The earth holds her  
as she holds the bowl —  
ask kiva,  
or shrine, how much longer?  
No titan,  
no destroyer,  
no future thought,  
can part  
earth and this woman,

woman and bowl:  
the same shawl  
wraps them around.

## INDIAN SUMMER

What was the tune you heard on the way  
that you must dawdle here,  
cut a reed like any truant,  
cut crooked holes in the reed,  
and dabble with burbling phrases  
which can only tremble and halt  
no matter how fearfully carefully you blow?  
The tune you heard didn't limp?  
Time, you're a dunce.  
My word on it —  
you could have  
breathed echo when the air was near —  
now it's a wraith  
beyond even tiny embodiment!  
That amorphous haze,  
arpeggic fall of those leaves,  
glint of that bird — or was it a squirrel? —  
(had it been a rat it would have bitten you!)  
they ought to preach your heedlessness,  
no man can essay a pavanne  
with his phrases at variance —  
it *is* a pavanne, don't deny it!  
And why propose a pavanne  
when nobody dances pavannes,

and why ask a flute  
 to mimic the tone of a spinet?  
 Dear dunce —  
 your tune begins to sound feminine —  
 go away —  
 the phrases are exquisite daggers —  
 move along, move along:  
 we have all sought the same lady twice!

## ARABS

Melancholy lieth dolorously ill,  
 one heel full fatally smitten:  
 Melancholy twitcheth and sigheth:  
 “ Must such as I, because of an itch,  
*move* from the cheery sloth of a couch,  
 from watching my valorous nomad musings  
 coming and passing like pilgrims en route  
 from mooning philosophy on to the sun —  
 must such as I, almost ready to follow them,  
 legs follow musings like sheep follow bells —  
 must such as I, because of a scratch  
 imprinted by small, ignominious teeth  
 of a small, black, common, effeminate witch,  
 surely not one of my bidding — *move?*  
 What way is this, God, to make a man move? ”  
 And his bed-fellow,  
 Happiness, petrified, groaneth:  
 “ What way is this, God, to make a man stone? ”

## MIRAGE

Yonder hill  
lifts its blue mist,  
like a lady a fan,  
and lowers it,  
enticing you further.  
Can you enfold her? —  
suppose you do? —  
and only the mist embrace you? —  
don't conclude the fan the lady!  
Suppose you can't? —  
and the mist slap your face? —  
don't conclude the fan a fan,  
no lady behind it:  
yonder hill  
lifts its blue mist,  
like a lady a fan.

## PATCH

I shall turn my yard into dahlias —  
or better still, marigolds!  
I cannot endure  
the spectre of its baldness.  
I am old —  
nay worse, middle-aged!  
The very young girls  
no longer kiss me —  
with objection!

One of the brazen sect —  
 does the devil send them back from the past? —  
 actually fondled my gnu's beard,  
 and brushed my promontory with her cheek,  
 to the tune of "pretty patch, pretty patch!"  
 I do not mind being loved —  
 but I do care  
 about playing specimen  
 for a sensation  
 a very young girl  
 cannot have of a very young man!  
 To-morrow —  
 nay, to-night —  
 my seeding begins! —  
 Marigolds, dahlias, asters, daisies, weeds —  
 any growth will do!

## THRENODY

I have been a snob to-day.  
 Scourge me with a thousand thongs!  
 The crowds were atoms passing by.  
 Plunge me into a vat of tar!  
 Love was dead all day.

Tyrant I had a feast of self.  
 Hang me from the city gallows!  
 His harem, pride and vanity.  
 Throw my body to Doodle Dandy!  
 Love was dead all day.



Let him tear my I from me.  
Let him stick it on a pike.  
Let him dance through every street.  
For all to jeer, for all to damn.  
Love was dead all day.

Let him fling the selfish thing  
into the public pool of shame.  
And raise a stone that all may read,  
those that live and those to come:  
“Love was dead all day.”

## SUN-WATER

Only yesterday —  
I used  
to carry  
my old winter bones  
through the streets —  
no sun  
to make the sap in them stir —  
no stream  
to make the sap in them start —  
and now that I'm here,  
sun up there, stream out there,  
sun out there, stream up there —  
I don't know  
what I want to say,  
even towards a vain  
little self-tickling song?

Very early spring:  
will you wait for me?

## KEG

What use is this stream? —  
there isn't a keg anywhere  
for us to ride,  
like a pony, bareback —  
if we had a keg to ride,  
we wouldn't be tempted to beg anywhere —  
we couldn't, you know, on a keg in a stream —  
and any time I'd beg of you —  
any time I did, and you'd think me too near —  
you'd give the keg a kick —  
and I'd roll to the other side —  
what use is this stream?

## THE HUDSON

Great, broad stream:  
When I am brave,  
will you carry me along  
to your mother, the sea? —  
I've heard your mother, the sea, croon afar,  
“ they were brave,”  
as she cradles their bodies;  
“ they were brave,”  
your child-echo crooning us here.  
I want my body to be firm,  
my face and eyes smooth;

when I go there must be pride  
in my final thought; equality  
with my eternal fellows; shadow  
must greet shadows with clean hand;  
this is no time to take me, stream;  
my death must be like theirs!

And she —

she who stands behind me,  
wistful, glad and nodding me courage —  
she, too, must be able to croon,  
“he was brave.”

## GOLDPIECES AND HEMSTITCHES

### BELL

I'm full of children this morning.  
I can feel them  
flying kites  
all the way up and down my veins.  
You never saw  
such black eyes, bloody noses,  
never heard such laughter.

§

When school time comes,  
they'll go away — all except one.  
I hope that bell never rings.

### GOLDPIECES

Lads,  
along the way of my time,  
I have stooped to many pieces,  
most of them bad.  
But you  
like their jangle  
as much as their jingle.

Whether you earn them or not,  
the gold ones are for you.

## CRADLE

The blue-eyed youngster  
and the fat old man  
play ball in me.  
And music —  
the one his penny flute,  
the other his bassoon.  
Their toleration is most indulgent —  
the one with grins,  
the other with a smile.  
When they are tired,  
they go to bed together,  
though their dreams —  
the one dreams of solemn white beards,  
the other of twinkling white legs.  
The woman,  
who looks in on them at times,  
careful not to disturb them,  
likes this time best.  
She rocks their cradle for them.

## CHINAMAN

It is useless  
to contend  
with her superstitions.  
That she is lovely  
and loveth thee  
should quiet thee.

When some dream of hers,  
not come true,  
masters her and masters thee,  
then is the night to cry,  
ah me,  
and seek thy bed. . . .

Smile thy prayer  
like a Chinaman.

## CRIES

How can you ask  
milk of her heart  
when she only has  
milk in her breasts,  
milk of her breasts  
destined for a cry  
milk in her heart  
could never nourish?

## MOLLUSC

Try your dagger elsewhere.  
You will only snap it here.  
Her heart is a mollusc.  
It never leaves her body.

## BOY-LIGHTNING

Oh, big Mister Cloud,  
send me a black cloak like yours?

And a white plume and ruffles —  
And your dagger!  
Maybe it's a tomahawk!  
Please, Mister Cloud,  
I'd be the pride of the street like you,  
and scare everybody — even the bullies!  
Mother wouldn't dare call me home!

And your blue wings,  
maybe you'd send me your wings?  
So I could fly?  
Or sail!

Mister Cloud, you're worse than a giant —  
how you growl, how you glare, how you shout —  
don't, don't go away, don't, don't go away!

You're crawling on your enemies?  
On the palefaces?  
Kill 'em, kill 'em all, kill 'em, kill 'em all —  
but look out, Mister Cloud!  
Snatch off your plume or they'll see you —  
hide your tomahawk!  
Oo, Mister Cloud!

## HEMSTITCHES

Lasses,  
I could do better  
hemstitches for you

if I were a woman —  
 preferably not your mother —  
 but try to imagine  
 that, though I loved such as you,  
 older than you,  
 I will never love you,  
 and I will sew you something  
 you can tuck away  
 in the secret drawer of your dresser,  
 you may take out  
 if only to try on near your glass  
 on such nights  
 when you are lonesome,  
 and no boy gives you a thought.

## POLYSYLLABLE

You would say —  
 a girl of six  
 is hardly old enough for philosophy —  
 but you would say, wouldn't you? —  
 a girl of six  
 is old enough for pain,  
 old enough to be sought  
 by the fashionable lover, death,  
 and his thumbs of strangulation? —  
 and you would say, had you seen her, wouldn't  
     you? —  
 a girl of six



is old enough for grammar  
and the adept use of monosyllables  
with the intrusion of an occasional polysyllable? —  
and you would have said, had you heard her, wouldn't  
you? —

there was absolutely no theological intention  
in what she asked —

a girl of six

is hardly old enough for that, although  
her mother had told her, God had made her —

“What did I do to God  
that He does this to me?

Am I not His child —  
or did I misbehave?”

#### CLOVER

The next time you come, small sister,  
you and your shy smaller brother,  
you lifting your head and pointing your eyes  
(clover asleep in your arms),  
he too small to be braver than shy:  
If I'm not at home, if by that time,  
a day too old, I'm asleep in the ground,  
you try asking him  
those questions that wrinkled my head,  
(I never able to answer a question),  
and when your brother responds,  
if by that time he's taller than shy,

maybe I'll answer too,  
 with the nod of a clover,  
 if by that time I'm a clover awake?

## ROUGE

You, lass  
 (the one-not-quite-dear-enough),  
 are such and such a person  
 with such and such an appearance.  
 What's that you say? —  
 there's no helping the latter?  
 (Wait — you're younger,  
 quicker than I —  
 feminine, more feminine —  
 wait and I'm with you —  
 here's what I'm coming to!)  
 Redden your heart,  
 not your face —  
 contract it,  
 squeeze it,  
 (you know what I mean?)  
 hug yourself,  
 want yourself,  
 want yourself lovelier,  
 (I don't mean as to face!)  
 and it'll redden, have  
 and give deeper thrills —  
 and you, yes, you too —

(and so will your face!)  
and win wiser fellows  
and hold them much longer! —  
what's that you say?  
They, even they  
stay longer for faces? —  
perhaps — yes — but —  
redden it anyhow,  
redden it all the more —  
(what I mean is —  
what I'm coming to)  
your self-love —  
which, do you see,  
is what we all look into? —  
will always  
give you  
something quite-dear-enough  
to ponder —  
and as to those chaps,  
(men are so dull!)  
let them look to their own!  
Now, should one of them,  
even one of them —  
(blessed with instinct  
he got from his mother  
more than his father —  
that you may swear to!)  
should such a one  
come prying —

he and his self-love —  
with an idea  
(always the same at the last)  
to change your person to his —  
thinking he can do so —  
you change his to yours,  
if you can,  
and if you can't,  
there's no use anyhow —  
he's no good that way —  
if it must be that way —  
and it usually must  
(unless I'm dull too) —  
so, send him home —  
give him a bone or a locket  
to gnaw at or finger —  
there's nourishment in memory —  
his pride will recover —  
do you see?  
What's that? — it's sad? —  
of course! — everything is! —  
(and so much the better,  
life so much richer!)  
for, whether you win him,  
or he win you,  
or you lose him,  
or he lose you,  
(and, do you see,

there's never the one nor the other?)  
of course — it's sad — everything is —  
(what I mean is)  
that's not enough reason  
for sitting so glum —  
flowers don't do it! . . .  
What I'm coming to  
(one moment more,  
hang it all!) —  
nobody'll ever get you —  
it'll always be you  
that chases you  
and catches you,  
if it can! —  
so, hug yourself,  
want yourself,  
want yourself lovelier  
(here's what I mean,  
I suppose)  
for your own  
almost-dear-enough sake —  
and your face will do the rest —  
if it must —  
if you want it to —  
if you can't help but want it to —  
you, perhaps, with an eye  
on some bee of a chap  
you'd like to give

what you can of yourself —  
 (of you — to him — for you! —  
 the sly boomerang, eh?)  
 for you to be proud of —  
 and him to be proud of —  
 though, as I say —  
 it's only himself that he's after —  
 (you two and your two!)  
 do you see?  
 It's a muddle — I know —  
 but don't droop your head —  
 that's right! — get up! — fine! —  
 Now — try — your — glass!  
 Eh?

#### KATYDIDS

Lass and lad,  
 consider your friends and relations —  
 this laughter of yours  
 is unmoral — *immoral* really!  
 On the grave of one's love, nobody  
 sings a katydid duo,  
 does a gargoyle dance,  
 drops irresponsible flowers!

Not dead? Yes, it is!  
 The one slinks this way,  
 the other slinks that,  
 when you're through pirouetting?

At least have it look like death —  
joy is indecent,  
inconsiderate, unsociable —  
you'll never win stones in that fashion!

## OLD PEOPLE

### ENDINGS

Life, loving to listen  
to old folk  
arguing the comparative  
claims upon glory  
of the diseases they've had  
that he brought them —  
each one's resistance  
mightier than his rivals',  
and each one's pride  
gorgeously inflating the facts of a case —  
and Death, just loving to reflect  
on the cool, healing kiss,  
a round period with which  
she'll seal their stories:  
these twain  
are almost like twins  
craving the same old tale  
be told in the same old way —  
these twain would be twins  
were it not for the preference,  
that Life  
likes his to end in adventure,  
while Death  
likes hers to end at home.



## PHALLIC

Hail, steel  
    spike of a river,  
bending and straightening,  
forcing and twisting,  
    driving your way  
down the bowels of  
    hills and mountains,  
bending them back on all sides,  
breaking them open,  
tearing up children,  
    stones strewn everywhere! —

Your soft, clear look with its  
    stone-white thought —  
hail, crooked grandmother,  
humped on a boulder,  
eyeing your daughters,  
heedless of thought  
from heeding their reckless,  
    stone-smooth,  
shell-tinted offspring —  
none old enough  
to think as you do —  
hail to your look as it lights  
    still softer  
on the filthy (some would say)  
    little boys

digging their way  
down the mud of its banks!

## A WHILE

Rain drops,  
passionately gregarious,  
passionately garrulous,  
as they come,  
driven like tears  
from Eden's trees,  
in fore-knowledge  
of house-tops  
where egos scatter —  
unless and until  
they touch ground-holes  
where egos stick  
and at least do some good —  
are the kin of  
blood drops, tongues  
and the words  
of old people,  
reminiscently gregarious,  
reminiscently garrulous —  
unless and until  
they have children.  
This is why  
I hearken the childless,  
and assume the rôle  
of repartee breezes :

juggling rain  
or juggling blood,  
breezes keep drops  
from falling —  
a while.

## MIDDLE-AGE

She,  
like an old-time street organ  
which has lost its half-tones,  
or never had any,  
is frantically running the diatonic —  
whether to find those tones,  
or to save the loss of these she has,  
is not for me to know.

The one for whom she plays  
is a wheezy accordeon  
whose one everlasting tonality  
lies in a foreign key.

## OLD MARRIAGE

That old fool —  
as the men-folk sneer —  
trudging the hill —  
his mule-day over —  
is it because his back is bent —  
that he carries those dandelions —  
the easier to reach if you're bent? —

or is it because —  
as the women-folk sigh —  
he has warmed-over whims —  
for that other old fool —  
at the top of the hill —  
is it the sunset beckons him to?

## OLD BEGGAR HEELS

The right of the heel  
of her right shoe and  
the left of the heel of her left  
are worn to the ground,  
so wabbly and low  
does she bend her knees,  
so long has she done it there.

Give her a penny,  
and you will see.  
If you want to be sure,  
give her two.

## TRIANGLES: IN MEMORY OF H. C. K.

This is the last long tired day;  
the omnipresence of dissolution,  
dwarfed to the circle of each eye.

The dance of his breathing,  
quicker and louder than scraping of feet,  
ceases like sap in leaves that are still.

*One eye says to another:*

This was a dance like staccato of steel  
in the hand of an invisible madman  
thrusting the past with the final deep twist.

*One eye says to another:*

His eyes brushed mine like dogs,  
which I must house and feed,  
lest I be henceforth alone.

*One eye says to another:*

I'm afraid to breathe in,  
for fear of breathing out;  
yet breathe out, one must, to breathe in.

*One eye says to another:*

But there's comfort in formulas,  
in the easy triangular round;  
have his stone-lip lisp it again:

*Eyes breathe softly to eyes:*

May this entity,  
now a nonentity,  
not lose identity.

Eyes embrace eyes . . .  
and dance his dirge . . .  
to their own minuets . . .

## PROSE RHYTHMS, 1906

## A LOVER TELLS

It is a bit of a river that flows between two strips of land. Thousands of honeyless hives bury the strip on this, thousands the strip on that side — honeyless hives choked by honeyless, two-legged lives — but what of these? It is night.

It is night, and a song, borne by a friendly wind, steals across the river, across from yonder side to this, across to me. It is not a song of night's; it is not a song of Nature's; it is not a song of the gods. It is . . . but stay! It is not for you. Your name is Profanation; you are of the honeyless two-legs that choke the honeyless hives that bury the earth . . .

It is a bit of a river that flows between. It is night. A song steals across to me. And only the river 'twixt singer and me!

## A POOR MAN TELLS

Nature, like some harlot of the streets, was wearing her freshest rouge and her latest fashion's costume. Behind the rouge and the costume, the old allurements watched and waited: the still tempting face, the still voluptuous body. It was poor I who chanced to pass that way, and stopped, though much against my will. And Nature whispered me something: whispered me her price with her sighing, ca-

joling voice. I moved on a little, hesitated and stopped again. Yes, I would have dared, but I could not dare. I would have dared to approach, look into the ever tempting face, raise the garment and enjoy the ever voluptuous body. But I could not dare: Nature's price was too high for my soul's thin pocketbook. And I passed on, though much against my will.

## A MADMAN TELLS

Mirrored in the depths of thy twin tarns of loveliness so tender, where, as elsewhere, spring laughs, summer roves, autumn dreams and winter sleeps; and where, as elsewhere, joy and passion and melancholy and sorrow pass their lives, so constant and so pure, certain twin reflections have enshrined themselves in holy, beatific solitude. Ripples come, disport themselves, chase one another and disappear, and the tarns frown or smile as is their mood. The wind, jealous, of an avaricious temper, and weary of the love of flowers and butterflies, deserts his southern clime to woo these brides with his song, so melodious, so haunting, so compelling. But the tarns frown or smile as is their mood. The feathered children of the air fly from afar and, in the joy of the moment, serenade the consecrated spot with their poignant outpouring of an idolatrous invocation. But the tarns frown or smile as is their mood. Notwithstanding that the ripples come and disport them-

selves, that the wind steals hither to woo, that the children of the air gather for their invocation, the twin reflections lament not, neither do they sorrow. For the ripples will go and the wind will go and the air folks will go, hence, far away, to unknown climes, to return again, but only to go, always to go. Therefore, the twin reflections are happy, immortally happy, whether spring laugh or summer rove or autumn dream or winter sleep, for, in the depths of the tarns they have enshrined themselves in holy, beatific solitude, living, sleeping and dreaming an everlasting elysium of elysian transcendentalism. Blissful, ah, blissful I!

#### A DEAD MAN TELLS

Indifferently, and yet, with an unbiased sort of half sportiveness, half seriousness, the rain beats down on my grave. The wind comes driving along from his home in the north-east, causing the trees to sing an unearthly air, now a dirge and now a scherzo. Down here, inside this lovely ebony casket that was, the worms, partly in joy and partly in regret, help themselves to that which is left of me to be dignified with the name, Body, at the same time giving me the delightful assurance that my skeleton days and those days when I am to romp with companion dust atoms are not so far hence. What an inestimable pleasure it is for me to reflect, that when Nature, assisted by these gentle myrmidons of hers, shall have



realized her little business of the decomposition of my body, she will have succeeded with an even closer artistic completeness than Life and his myrmidons in their decomposition of that part of me which I once tried to dignify with the name, Soul!

## DOROTHY

### HER EYES

Her eyes hold black whips —  
    dart of a whip  
    lashing, nay, flicking,  
    nay, merely caressing  
    the hide of a heart —  
and a broncho tears through canyons —  
    walls reverberating,  
    sluggish streams  
    shaken to rapids and torrents,  
    storm destroying  
    silence and solitude!

Her eyes throw black lariats —  
    one for his head,  
    one for his heels —  
and the beast lies vanquished —  
    walls still,  
    streams still —  
    except for a tarn,  
    or is it a pool,  
    or is it a whirlpool  
    twitching with memory?

## HER HAIR

Her hair  
is a tent

held down by two pegs —  
ears, very likely —  
where two gypsies —  
lips, dull folk call them —  
read your soul away:  
one promising something,  
the other stealing it.

If the pegs would let go —  
why is it they're hidden? —  
and the tent

blow away — drop away —  
like a wig — or a nest —  
maybe  
you'd escape  
paying coin  
to gypsies —  
maybe —

## HER HANDS

Blue veins  
of morning glories —  
blue veins  
of clouds —  
blue veins  
bring deep-toned silence  
after a storm.

White horns  
of morning glories —  
white flutes  
of clouds —  
sextettes hold silence fast,  
cup it for aye.

Could I  
blow morning glories —  
could I  
lip clouds —  
I'd sound the silence  
her hands bring to me.

Had I  
the yester sun —  
had I  
the morrow's —  
brush them like cymbals,  
I'd then sound the noise.

#### HER BODY

Her body gleams  
like an altar candle —  
white in the dark —  
and modulates  
to voluptuous bronze —  
bronze of a sea —  
under the flame.

## CLAY

I wish  
there were thirteen  
gods in the sky,  
even twelve might achieve it:

Or even  
one god  
in me:

Alone,  
I can't shape  
an image of her.

## OVALS

I find my faith  
in two oval rooms  
an inch apart:  
uncertain in the one,  
I have only to glance at the other!

## ALCHEMY

Not even rain  
could make her lovelier —  
and I am no god.

## OTHERS

There is too  
the love of her

through others'  
love of her.

There is too  
the love of her  
through others'  
love of her  
love of me.

There is even  
the love of her  
though others'  
love of her  
be only  
love of my  
love of her.

THREE

I and my  
lovely lady  
sit down  
where we can see each other  
and chat about  
the  
lovely lady  
I and my  
lovely lady  
love.

## WESTMINSTER

The niche  
cut for her  
by chance and her and me  
might be deeper  
if chance and she and I  
had been some other  
chance and she and I.  
But there it is!

## AGATE

Memories take the impress of shadows  
one breathes on the face of a stream:  
black agate the shadow she leaves.

## ILLUSIONS

This tree,  
whose top flirted with the sky,  
whose branches dared the uttermost east and west,  
whose roots penetrated China,  
whose leaves were elves —

My companion gone,  
it is less than a shrub.

## JADE

Towards the green and age  
of Chinese jade,

the moods and thoughts  
of the eyes and leaves  
of the cat and tree  
in the tiny close  
of my her for me  
lift and lower:  
lower, then lift  
towards my me for her,  
the age and green  
of the Chinese love  
I feel for her,  
and try to carve  
and pray to see  
in this jade for her.

## IMAGE

Showing her immortal —  
it's mine to do —  
but I can't.  
Shaping her —  
just as she is —  
a thing  
to turn a glance  
to an eternity —  
mood shaping form —  
imperishable —  
it's there —  
I can see it —  
but I can't say it.



There's no secret about it —  
she tells it  
every breathing, breathless moment —  
I can hear it —  
but I can't say it.

What can my mere  
body and scrivening  
leave you, if  
it doesn't leave you her?

If I could transcribe  
one infinitesimal phase  
of the trillion-starred endowment  
which comes tumbling  
out of simply trying to look at her,  
or out of catching a glance,  
slyly pointed,  
trying to look at me,  
stirring a trillion-starred emotion,  
vibrating like a bell  
across endless tides of endless seas —  
I'd do it —  
but I can't.

I love her so much,  
I can't do anything else.

## BLOOD OF THINGS

### SCRAP

I'm a scrap of paper —  
nothing to look at or ponder, they think,  
who see but themselves wherever they crawl!  
To urchin and artist,  
ragpicker, seer —  
I'm shiny, crinkly, shapely, white!  
Out come their heads, like turtles', they do!

### PUMP

I'm not the scullery-scrub of the street!  
Let wind, rain and sun rinse and shine it!  
I'm a low round steady back  
for a child  
who hasn't reached boyhood  
to learn leap-frogging —  
and for a boy  
who's reached manhood —  
not to forget!

### PUDDLE

If your feather's gone crooked in the wind, try me:  
I'm the mirror, lass, you couldn't take along!

If the city's made you lose, lad, your lake in the  
woods:

I'm the pool — wade in! — you didn't leave behind!

If your legs have softened muscles from living in a  
house:

take a jump across my breast — it's water you need  
now!

If you've stumbled on the habit of staring at the  
ground:

pay me the fare of a glance, and I'll ride you to the  
sky!

## SHOW-CASE

Twenty-four white collars  
will find twenty-four callers:  
if he lives well, size sixteen,  
thin, old or vain, size twelve:  
bad, a noose were fitter, dead, a wreath,  
sixteen or twelve quite the same:  
so, for the temporal present, come,  
twenty-four callers, and find  
twenty-four white collars!

## CIGAR-INDIAN

My tomahawk —  
will it descend — strike — cleave a white skull?  
No — I am obsolete —  
a servile symbol  
of the art of my ancestors fallen a trade —  
inside, the symbol of conquest —

a shopkeeper — this one a German!  
 Behold in me,  
 the defeat of the past —  
 sculptured dissolution;  
 and the new scarecrow —  
 man turned to wood!  
 May the next who tomahawks peace —  
 take my place!

## CIGAR-BUTT

I'm the shabby relic of yestereve —  
 spent it with a lady and a gentleman —  
 lady cost him thirteen dollars, fourteen agonies —  
 I but fifteen cents!  
 Yet I who helped him with his revery —  
 I who helped him decide to marry her —  
 I who helped him better than stammer the pro-  
 posal —  
 helped him reform, give up painting, start in busi-  
 ness, start a home —  
 home, children, furniture, trappings and all,  
 all a consequential adjunct to the realm —  
 I who helped him be what he is —  
 me he threw in the gutter —  
 me, at least, the tomb of what he was!

## LETTER-BOX

Lift your hand to mine —  
 a little higher — don't be timid —

and to-morrow — or Thursday, the latest —  
another — smaller than yours —  
will approach my green brother's —  
(Toledo, did you say?)  
and the next day — or Saturday, the latest —  
still another — my gray brother's —  
will return your boomerang!

## DUST

We are molecules —  
whose fate it is to quarrel —  
who knows why?  
It isn't when we're underfoot —  
it's when we're in the air —  
two of us after one air-hole!  
We don't do it —  
we like being still —  
it's the wind does it!  
Do lovers know why?

## PARK-BENCH

I'm long and green and cool  
like the tree that I came from.  
They set me here,  
the ones who are long on green,  
to keep cool the ones who aren't.  
And to render back to God,  
through me if they can,

what they have stolen  
of the freedom of things!

## WEIGHING-MACHINE

There's the one who wheedles —  
“ lift your pointer three pounds higher ” —  
and the other who wheedles —  
“ drop it three pounds lower ”—  
always meeting in the sorry duet —  
“ so I find favor with him ! ”  
I say to them both, to them all —  
weight is the substance of earthly endeavor,  
and if I were a man,  
science would choose me the bigger,  
since decomposition asserts,  
the nearer to lean, the nearer to death,  
and self-preservation,  
the nearer to stout, the nearer to life —  
but as I'm a weighing-machine,  
set here to adjudicate avoirdupois,  
wisdom would choose me the smaller:  
she gives me lighter work to do —  
and some day, some stout one will kill me!

## DUNG

I have my uses too:  
I relieve satiety:  
I satisfy hunger:  
horse and fly!

And my country cousin:  
cattle and grain!  
If we didn't:  
where would man be?

## ELECTRIC SIGN

I call your attention to me —  
I am America!  
I come in the dark —  
I burn and blaze the dark away!  
I am electricity —  
I set fire to the street,  
like lightning all heaven!  
Whether you want to or whether you don't,  
you've got to see me —  
the biggest crowd in the world comes to me —  
richest and poorest — jolliest brotherhood —  
crowds jostle crowds for me —  
I am Broadway!  
Whether you need it or whether you don't,  
you've got to buy what I sell —  
I sell the products of this, my land,  
as multiform, numerous and skillfully contrived  
as the tiniest particles  
of this, my earth and mountains,  
of this, my lakes and rivers,  
of this, my stars and sky!  
My neighbor there — he's selling the same —  
it's the best on the globe — after mine!

We're competitors in the main artery  
 of strife which gives life to the body  
 and perpetual ore to the soul!  
 I was born in America —  
 I was made in America —  
 and I'll go to the scrap-heap of America —  
 to make room for some greater American!  
 Do I brag? —  
 sensitive, cultured, reticent foreigner,  
 why shouldn't I? —  
 I'm the ego of the new world —  
 Africa — Asia — Europe —  
 the old world's dead — I'm the new!  
 I call your attention to me —  
 I come in the dark —  
 skeptical foreigner, mark you this boast —  
 yesterday's history, prepare a new page:  
 To-morrow, you'll see me in Europe!

## BITS

I found these bits  
 while going along  
 from Fourteenth Street to Forty-second.  
 How could those fellows ask a fellow going along —  
 policeman, vender, truck driver,  
 motorman, and even the snobbish chauffeur —  
 how could they bawl out that symphony,  
 cacophonous and contrapuntal —  
 "where in Hell are you going?" —



at a fellow with nothing but a pencil and a pad?  
You have to be blind, hard of hearing,  
to see what street things do!  
You have to change to a thing,  
ere things can speak to you!

## COINS

## I. COPPER

Some bodies chase pennies,  
and live penny lives,  
by hoarding three pennies,  
in fear of just two;  
then hoarding two pennies,  
in fear of just one;  
then hoarding one penny,  
in fear of the zero,  
as round in its emptiness,  
perfectly round,  
as bodies all are  
which chase pennies.

## II. SILVER

Whether winds chase the clouds,  
or clouds chase the winds;  
whether shadows the grasses,  
or grasses the shadows;  
which part of the circle

starts chasing the rest's  
    unimportant; important  
that bodies chase bodies  
with undulating,  
mystic caresses  
of unseen wings:  
    wings brushing wings.

### III. GOLD

Something flipped somebody  
into the air, and he fell,  
head over tail over head over tail,  
a moth blind with stars,  
clutching light, clutching dark:  
    here — where —  
hand of man, feet of bug:  
fail not to turn him, if  
you would have both of him,  
undermost, equal to, if not  
as cleanly as uppermost:  
    see?

## THE ROUND OF A FIVE AND TEN CENT STORE

### THINGS

We five and ten cent things are small —

but —

neglect of a button may lose you your job,  
hook and eye crooked, her social prestige:  
angles of pins web her hair, luring you,  
a prince in her thought with a pin in your tie:  
unseen safeties smooth her bodice round her breast,  
unseen stitches, your jacket round your chest:  
we five and ten cent things are small —

but —

a but can grow bigger than a tragedy, sir!

*Here's seed for your bird, sir — come, make  
it sing!*

### RING

Now — the fourth finger tip

of her left hand —

that's the lip to her heart —

the digit itself, sir, the artery —

so — if you touch the tip with your tip —

index tip of your right —

then — if her heart likes it —

it'll tell the digit,  
 which'll tell the tip,  
 which'll tell your lip —  
 whether to buy me!  
 Or — better still —  
 take her tip between index and thumb —  
 like a telegrapher —  
 you can never be sure of a method with woman!  
 Then — oh! —  
 is this the lady? —  
 gee, she's nice! —  
 why'd you not say you knew how? —  
 bashful? — I know! —  
 I hope I'll do? — ah!  
*That'll cost you a nickel, sir — thank you!*

## HATCHET VERSUS HAMMER

The past needs chopping away:  
 buy a "Washington" hatchet — that's me!  
 The present needs knocking fast:  
 don't buy a "King" hammer — that's him!  
 Use my edge for the one,  
 my back for the other:  
 one man's job is a better man's job!  
*There's chopping to do every day, sir!*

## PAPER ROSES

We're stronger than Nature's roses —  
 we're women's roses —

grew from the tendrils of women —  
 each woman's ten tendrils —  
 for the joy of other women —  
 east side women —  
 and the gift of east side men —  
 east side pocketbooks!  
 Women know women —  
 make roses which last!  
*They'll cost you a dime, sir — thank you!*

## THIMBLE

I'm intended  
 for her third finger tip —  
 lest a needle prick it —  
 and for the tips of her lashes —  
 should a word-needle, them!  
*Lip salve'll help the hurt if you do, sir!*

## COFFEE-MILL

Like Mother Dew  
 bent over her soil —  
 grind away merrily —  
 make the morning smell brown —  
 till the whole room itself churn round!  
*Coffee boils deeper than roses, sir!*

## DISHES

A lot of us together —  
 we do look prosperous —

make a funny clatter —  
 our curves best for mouths —  
 our flats load whole muttons —  
 our sides walls for gravy!  
 Gravy — there's the danger —  
 pray God, don't bring her  
 a lot of us together —  
 a dish pan's a grave —  
 and dish water's gravy  
 that'll foul the meat of your love —  
 and stick to the remains like a shroud!  
*Don't let those glasses squeeze, sir — they're fragile!*

MOUSE-TRAP

You two need a trap with four holes:  
 one to catch her illusions:  
 one to catch yours:  
 one to catch your self-love:  
 one to catch hers:  
 only then will one cheese last you two!  
*Warranted to kill as soon as they nibble, sir!*

AISLES

Your eyes have spied us:  
 your feet have come and gone!  
 Your hands have reached across us:  
 salesgirls reached you theirs!  
 Ribbons you bought tied her hat to her head:  
 we're more than ribbons that tie her to you!

Nighttime, it's we that can't close our eyes:  
daytime, it's we that pray you'll return!  
*Aigrettes?* — *not here, sir!* — *they'd fly away!*

## NICKELS AND DIMES

You helped us build our skyscraper!  
We've helped you build yours!  
May God tip the spire!  
*Costs a prayer extra, sir* — *don't mention it!*

## ROUND

A mere poet  
is penniless.  
Mightn't he try  
a round poem  
to bind her?  
*That'll bring her liberty, sir!*

## PHYSIOLOGY

### LEAVES

We were green, green! —  
till they wrung out our  
blood, the green sap!  
Now we are white —  
white as white can be to the eye,  
black as white can be to the thought!  
Lines, thin lines are our veins —  
most of them, horizontal parallels,  
two of them, vertical parallels! —  
horizontals blue, verticals pink,  
mocking the texture of man-veins! —  
the pink, erect as two columns,  
mocking the stability of civilization!

He holds us down with one hand  
and with the other, gripping a feather,  
spatters us with hieroglyphs! —  
not like an aboriginal,  
red-burning African, red-burning Eskimo! —  
but like any white civilian  
with his hieroglyphs, hieroglyphs,  
some down one column, some down the other,



more down one column, more down the other —  
hating, detesting, knifing each other  
as only a debit and credit can hate!  
We were green! —  
we used to sing  
to the wand of the wind!

## EYES

We are his eyes.  
We do not see.  
We do not see grain,  
we see people;  
we do not see people,  
we see people gathering grain;  
we do not see people gathering grain,  
we see people loading freight cars;  
we do not see people loading freight cars,  
we see freight cars en route;  
we do not see cars,  
we see endless eels,  
eels of white tape;  
we do not see tape,  
we see figures;  
we do not see figures —  
gold is what we see.  
We are his eyes.  
We tell him,  
buy wheat at par!

## STOMACH

I told him —  
that even in love —  
that thought for the without —  
one must preserve oneself.

I told him —  
a little love is admissible —  
all-love suicidal.

I told him —  
even if one love a little,  
one must preserve oneself.

I told him —  
even in fair play —  
the love phrase of commerce,  
which calls for a recognition of the balance  
between two factors or people —  
one must preserve oneself.

It's fine to say, but not fair,—  
not fair to oneself —

“ My dear sir, I'd like to offer you more than you  
ask ”—

that's an instance of loving,  
of a thought for the without —  
not an instance of living,  
of the thought for the within —  
as I told him.

He said,— but that was years ago —  
“ Mustn't I save my soul? ”—

and I said,— and that was instantaneously —  
“ Your body’s your soul —  
and even if it isn’t —  
don’t you need a body to preserve your soul? ”  
I’m proud of my pupil.  
I told him —  
and he was only a stripling.  
I haven’t had to tell him since.

## HEART

I was his heart. . . .  
I felt like a woman once.  
I used to stand at the well,  
pumping blood, lifting blood,  
blood as clean as water,  
and drop it into his pore-cups,  
millions of clean pore-cups. . . .  
Wriggling things slid into the well.  
Things his stomach vomited.  
That hag of the devil, his stomach. . . .  
They had to live.  
Even I will say, even they must live.  
So they devoured my blood.  
Smuttied it, soaked it in slime.  
And left offal. . . .  
I am his heart. . . .  
I pump offal, lift offal.  
Offal is what I give.  
Offal the pore-cups receive. . . .

I used to sing at my labors.

I don't sing now.

I whisper a curse. . . .

I am his hate. . . .

#### BRAINS

We are weary. . . .

We exist in the back of his head.

We are the worms squirming there.

Kick open some earth and you'll see us. . . .

We are his machinery.

Look at machines and you'll see us.

Their veins twist like ours. . . .

He keeps us slaving.

Day-time, over-time, dreaming-time.

He, a slave, keeps us slaving. . . .

There's a god in his middle.

He's worm to that god.

Poke a worm's middle, you'll see him. . . .

We want to rest.

To lie out flat.

We want him to die. . . .

Though earth worms go on.

Do outside what we did inside.

Brother worms wearier. . . .

Wearier than we are. . . .

## CITY DANDELIONS

JASMINE WAY

I hear it was a girl?

Why, they were saying it was a girl?

Isn't that nice and what are you calling him?

I'd an uncle by that name — it's so pretty — when's  
the christening?

I must wear my new white frock — Jonathan —  
they'll call him Johnny — have you tried our  
new green grocer?

So much cheaper than old Fleischmann — yours a  
boy, the Jones' a girl — they'll be sweethearts  
when they're bigger?

Well, I never — what with Mary Hatfield soon, and  
the Spindles to be married, Jasmine Way is  
certainly growing —

Good day to you, mam!

LANES

Do you wish to hear songs,  
silent songs,  
gone,  
to come,  
or never to come,  
no lane of fallen leaves,

however red or brown or gold,  
 however soft to the tread,  
 is as caressing  
 as the hard gray flagstone  
 of a city street.  
 Look at one and hear.

## CITY DANDELIONS

Jane Street  
 is ever gloomy towards evening,  
 Horatio and Charles,  
 Milligan and Gay:

A long, spectral, mysterious man  
 comes with his wand  
 and touches the lamps —  
 this one,  
 that one,  
 the next,  
 the next —  
 and they blossom!

Jane Street  
 smiles and is cheery at dawn,  
 Horatio and Charles,  
 Milligan and Gay:

The man comes again —  
 and this one,

that one,  
 the next,  
 the next —  
 blow away!

## TESTAMENTS

They wait under the same sky —  
 along the same level —  
 throughout the same rain —  
 and —  
 honest humans crawl to both —  
 but —  
 there is a difference  
 wider than a city block  
 between the House of Moses  
 on Second Avenue  
 and the Chapel of the Immaculate Virgin  
 on Third.

## MANUFACTURE

The great house is black.  
 Years ago, it was red —  
 made of red bricks,  
 made by red men.  
 The city,  
 a dream of white men turned to soot,  
 charcoaled it — don't blame the sun.  
 Cut into the huge wall —  
 here, there, here, there —  
 are windows

as regular as shiny playing cards.  
 Windows are  
 made of glass,  
 and as glass is transparent,  
 the mere effort of a glance may see  
 a stiff, perpetual,  
 right, left, right, left,  
 up, down, up, down,  
 arms, heads, arms, heads.  
 Are these, jokers, come to life? —  
 or mannikins,  
 made to jump on a string between sticks  
 by the mere effort of squeezing, relaxing?

LANDOWNER

(TO B. K.)

Because of his ownership  
 of a portion of the universe  
 so minute that not even Jehovah,  
 in his most omniscient mood,  
 could locate it;  
 because of his dominion  
 for a duration of the infinite  
 so infinitesimal that a  
 breath in, breath out  
 on the part of The Same  
 divides its be and be-not;  
 because of this empire of his  
 over a longitude and latitude



scarce the size or the strength  
of a pinchlet of dynamite —  
that blessèd microbe  
wears a silk hat  
on Sundays —  
while others, less blessed than he,  
dig up his potatoes,  
dig down their own graves —  
with the hope that their Mondays  
may grow to such Sundays.

## ROMAN HUNGER

(TO L. R.)

A truer harbinger  
of the dawn of a day's labors  
than any cock crow,  
a truer signal  
for the start of a race  
than whip, spur or pistol —  
the lady of the mansion  
blows her nose  
with a free and  
stentorian magnificence —  
a forest horn call  
for servants and maids  
to come scurrying  
from bed-room holes  
in garrets and cellars —  
a solemn command for

the eggs to start popping,  
the bacon to sizzling,  
the coffee to simmering —  
    for,  
be it known that,  
on this particular day  
(each day being particular),  
the lady suffers  
an unusually cosmic appetite —  
    and,  
that the sound may shatter  
unruly silence and penetrate walls,  
she employs no kerchief,  
but seizes her bedsheet —  
in which be it known  
to ears that stay skeptical,  
    though  
the thunder seizes  
black clouds to  
blow his nose,  
the crash is less  
terrifying to trees  
than the call to  
her slaves when  
their lady blows hers.

## HEREDITY

The old man  
in the drawing-room oil

invented the harrow,  
or the rake,  
or the hoe,  
or something.  
I didn't learn  
whether she  
is his daughter,  
or granddaughter,  
his niece, grandniece,  
or what.

But after seeing  
the blue and white awning  
playing tunnel from the curb to her front door,  
and that furniture,  
those rugs,  
those paintings,  
that statuary,  
the marble cupids in the gardens,  
and then the puppets who compose her society —  
I longed  
that some other  
had invented the harrow,  
or the rake,  
or the hoe,  
or something —  
or that the high forehead  
in the drawing-room oil  
had been a mere huckster

of shoe laces,  
 or rhubarb,  
 or whisk brooms,  
 or something.

THAT IS

If I weren't what I am —  
 if I hadn't been born what I was —  
 I wouldn't be what I am —

that is —

I'd have a decent job down-town —  
 with a stipend of respectable proportions —  
 I'd have a Sunday suit as well as a week-day —  
 I wouldn't be looking so shabby —  
 and my wife wouldn't eye me so —  
 I feel like a roach when she eyes me so —

that is —

if she weren't what she is —  
 if she hadn't been born what she was —  
 she wouldn't be what she is —  
 she wouldn't have a Sunday as well as a week-day —  
 and I wouldn't eye her so —  
 she turns like a thief when I eye her so —

that is —

if my mother and father had  
 had more discrimination in their choice of each  
 other —  
 if her mother and father had

had more discrimination in their choice of each  
other —  
no, that is —  
if Nature had had more discrimination with  
my mother and father and her mother and father —  
she wouldn't have asked me to go to the Browns —  
to-day being Sunday —  
or I'd surely have gone to the Browns —  
to-day being Sunday —  
and I with a Sunday suit —  
I with a decent job down-town —  
I with a respectable stipend —  
yes, that is —  
I wouldn't be sitting here —  
and she wouldn't be sitting there —  
she telling the Browns about it —  
and I reading Darwin —  
what can he tell me about it?

## DÉRÉGLÉ

In my mind,  
such as it is,  
bassoons hobnob with pelicans.  
The explanation is,  
since there must be an explanation,  
or a truth has, of course, no reason for being,  
or idea, still less, no right to be sounded —  
the explanation is not

in the interest for the contrasting facts,  
bassoons, very tall, very thin, very black,  
pelicans, very short, very stout, very white,  
any more than one's predilection for  
Voltaire, very tall, very thin,  
Rabelais, very short, very stout,  
is interest for the contrasting facts —  
but the explanation is, if it's this, that  
there's kinship with the exaggeration of  
bassoons and Voltaire high up,  
who see and who sing life as lower,  
and pelicans and Rabelais low down,  
who see and who sing life as higher,  
than it actually is if you're logical  
and true to your middleness of virtues —  
and the explanation is, if not this, that,  
since in my mind,  
such as it is,  
bassoons hobnob with pelicans,  
the deduction must be,  
in lands where there must be deductions,  
that this can but be an idea of some sort,  
and that this screed,  
such as it is,  
is an examination not  
into them so much as it is into me,  
which is, if you reason in rhyme,  
all that a screed can be,  
is it not?

32° FAHRENHEIT

To the really humble  
progenitor of Doctor Jurisprudence,  
or even the mere chaste student  
of his miraculous common denominator,  
a glimpse of the  
domestic discipline imposed,  
with such benign artistry,  
by her ladyship,  
the Unapproachable Irreproachable,  
will afford proof,  
without cost of emotion,  
of the favorite aphorism,  
that the perfecting of the microcosm  
is a closer adumbration of the  
Medico's sacred behest as to ethical procedure  
than the quixotic, out-of-doors  
pursuit of the macrocosm;  
an added glimpse of the  
breakfast repast-demeanor  
of his lordship,  
the Subdued Abducted,  
with a particular notation  
of how his once hot glances  
have become icicles of buttermilk,  
should crystallize wisdom,  
or celibacy, as it happens,

and therewith leave the heart frozen  
against further palpitation.

## ON DIT

It starts with a tongue  
hissing into an ear,  
spreading the vacuous  
head to a ball  
on strings of a neck  
legs run with on stilts  
through streets and down lanes,  
bumping folk in their stalls,  
pulling eyes out of sockets  
and tongues out of nests,  
eye-bloated, tongue-bellowed  
head-balloons tossing  
on neck strings and leg stilts  
from roofs down to sidewalks,  
back yards to front stoops,  
some tangled in wash lines  
or telegraph wires,  
only to jerk dangling messages there!

Comes a sun-prick of light,  
or a moon-wave of sleep,  
heads burst or lie limp  
like fish full of air  
or rats full of water  
in carts or in cellars!



## HELIOTROPE

“O, ah, ee. . . .

I want a man with leopard's eyes and the neck of  
a, neck of a swan,

I could hang him to the hottest, saddest tree in  
Hell,

and dance to the, dance to the tune of his writhing  
legs!

O, ah, ee. . . .

I'd crawl up beside him though the bark turn to, bark  
turn to thistles and thorns,

and strangle me with his wild, wild beard till my dead  
body be his dead body, and his dead body be, his  
dead body be. . . .”

The lady wears the mildest of blue eyes.

Receives every Friday at five.

Sips tea as you or I sip tea. . . .

But her cheek bones are high,

after the Polish fashion,

and of late,

she has been reading

Przybyszewski,

bound in heliotrope.

## WEDLOCK

It can never be

Angela,

though hers  
is a body  
for whose possession  
one would barter one's  
inheritance of Heaven.  
Of understanding  
she is as free  
as a mule.

It can never be  
Allura.  
Her soul shines  
like an owl's eye at night,  
and she plays Ravel  
as one loves to hear Ravel.  
But she is flat-breasted  
and powders her nose.

One should wed  
solitude.

#### ROOMS

The rooms you leave  
seem more sorrowful than faces ;  
they eye you like animals.

Their dumb service is past ;  
they have no legs to follow you.

If their courage had a tongue,  
it would have said, go;  
they have no ears for what you say. . . .

Monday,  
they will give what they gave you  
to an Italian woman with eight children.

## CARBON-DIOXIDE

Oh master Americans,  
so supreme over this and all ages  
in lawfully bridging the chasm  
between any two sums with the process,  
indigenous and doubly divine,  
of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division —  
I ask you, how is it,  
that the tiddle-diddle-doo  
breathed into yonder flute  
by the trained carbon-dioxide  
of yonder wandering tatterdemalion —  
how is it that,  
whereas you sanction the barter of  
hens for gold, pigs for gold, ducks for gold,  
by tossing your clinkety-clink  
to the merest squawk-squawk, oint-oint, quack-  
quack —  
that this tiddle-diddle-doo,  
while it doesn't say in words  
audible to the ear or legible to the eye —

“ will you drop me a penny for beauty? ”—  
 how is it, I say,  
 that that huckster of the flute,  
 who needs but an addition of oxygen  
 equal to a subtraction of carbon-dioxide,  
 lest he fall and beauty fall with him,  
 is thin as a worm and white as a shell? —  
 have you no process for pleasure,  
 or is pleasure unlawful among you?

$$17 + 4 \times 3 - 0$$

That superannuated,  
 moral supernumerary  
 of worldly well-being  
 Man has surnamed, Conscience,  
 is miraculously free from acrimonious shoots  
 in the breast of our American Citizen — for —  
 when one has a female helpmeet,  
 with seventeen graces, become  
 a slave of docility, become  
 a mummied puppet which bobs to us,  
 its mantelpiece Buddha,  
 for each nod we vouchsafe or glance awry,  
 which knows what dishes, what cutlery, what napery  
 should adorn the pabulum board,  
 and what proportion of calories and carbohydrates  
 the respective hours of eight, noon and six  
 should proffer for the god's health and propitiation,

which knows how near the moon his pillow should  
rise,

what wink of the morning to whisper,

“Cuckoo!”— and —

when one has a mission domicile

snuggling three more dormitories

than his Neighbor Citizen's bungalow,

plus three more Persian rugs,

plus three more Morris chairs,

plus three more sculptures cut in marble, not in  
clay — and —

when one has thus built and prevailed

through one's genius

in the addition, subtraction, multiplication and di-  
vision

of the numerals of Arabia

as applied to the bartering of corn in Nebraska —  
and —

when one has done all this and all that

under the motherly approbation

of that old dowager and monitress

over the good and evil conduct of

hens, caterpillars, crocodiles, giraffes, brook-trout,  
sea-urchins, pebbles, nasturtiums and weeping wil-  
lows,

Man in his discriminate affection has surnamed,  
Law —

who is there in our New England, Middle West or  
California,

who dares even dream disapprobation  
 when our American Citizen  
 remarks from the depths of his ease,  
 to his Neighbor Citizen  
 in the throes of his envy — “yes —  
 it’s a fine day —  
 trading was excellent —  
 my wife’s well —  
 the verandah’s newly painted —  
 we’re both fond of blue —  
 the latest? we’re calling him Archibald —  
 each man to his duty —  
 I’m not looking for credit — yes —  
 I’m voting the Republican ticket!”

## SUCH AND SUCH

It is very easy  
 for a dead emotion  
 to be very wise:  
 it is very easy  
 for a dead emotion  
 to prognosticate,  
 if such and such begin  
 between such and such,  
 such and such eventuates,  
 perforce beyond further peradventure:  
 ergo, you must not love.  
 It must be very nice  
 to feel nothing, know everything,

and be able to sit  
 the chair of philosophy,  
 or is it anthropology,  
 or is it psycho-analysis,  
 in an American university:  
 I should like so much  
 to be able to say,  
 perforce beyond further peradventure,  
 ergo, you must not live.  
 But it is very hard  
 for a such and such  
 to be very wise.

## FIFTH AVENUE

I sat on the front seat  
     of a Fifth Avenue bus —  
 an event — not significant:  
 I sat on the front seat,  
     thinking, reflecting, meditating —  
 on my importance to the world,  
     or — importance to myself? —  
 an inquiry — not significant —  
     but significant to me,  
 as I sat on that front seat,  
     reflecting back,  
     meditating forward —  
     thinking about  
 the significance of the sale  
     of a poem I had sold,

for five green leaves,  
to an editor —  
and which I would see  
in his paper to-morrow —  
and which his public  
would see and might read —  
million people, two million —  
and three or four of them,  
blessed with vision,  
might hail and remember, as significant —  
and me as important,  
not self-important:  
and I sat, meditating forward,  
toward a later sun-day,  
when I — yellow leaves richer — why not? —  
might be sitting — why not? —  
on the front seat  
of a runabout,  
or an automobile,  
or a limousine —  
recognized — pointed out — universally cheered —  
by this world of twin sidewalks —  
instead of unrecognized — ignored — alone —  
on the top of a bus,  
my thinking, reflecting, meditating  
bowing low — very low  
to hoping, speculating, imagining. . . .  
when of a sudden —  
with a clatter before and a clatter behind —



with a screaming before and a screeching behind —  
with universal vociferation fore and aft —

with a fellow in a silk hat,  
higher than Pike's Peak —  
on the back seat! —

a U-S-boat chasing a U-boat? —  
whizzed by — shot by — vanished —  
seen — not seen — heard — not heard!

He wasn't I — in fancy there —  
self-important grown important!

He wasn't I — in reincarnation of  
somebody like Homer's ghost —  
somebody like Shakespeare's —  
somebody like Whitman's!

He was in reality — in the bone and flesh —  
somebody like Wilson!

He was indeed — Woodrow Wilson!

This . . . is to-morrow. . . .

I'm still . . . alive. . . .

but no longer . . . dreaming. . . .

#### PROPAGANDA

Under one arm,  
she carried a dog,  
dog-docile dog,  
under the other,  
she squeezed a cat,  
cat-squirming cat;  
top of her hat,

she'd tied a cage,  
cage for a squirrel,  
squirrel-chat squirrel;  
top of her back,  
a bundle,  
enormous enough  
to take in a household;  
behind her,  
in front,  
on both sidewalks,  
in the gutter,  
and even from windows  
and veritable housetops,  
something like a million folk,  
so it seemed, crowded,  
thinking jostling absurdities,  
grinning grotesque good-fellowship,  
nudging strange ribs with strange elbows;  
and methought:  
Ludicrous creature,  
you do more,  
unconsciously,  
towards cementing folk,  
out in the open,  
than a congress of  
self-conscious,  
senatorial,  
ambassadorial,  
regal and

presidential  
orations,  
concerning leagues and the like —  
behind closed doors.

## CHESS PLAYERS

Chess players live in old damp basements,  
fifty or a hundred to the basement:  
old damp basements are chess players' homes,  
fifty or a hundred to the home.  
They play there, eat there, smoke there, sleep  
there —  
don't sleep on divans, settees, ottomans —  
sleep on the tables, or just underneath,  
or half the body on a chair, the other on the floor.  
(If you fancy me a raconteur,  
try Grand Street off the Bowery!)

Never a proprietor of old chess dungeons  
shoos away a neophyte of Caïssa's:  
lodging-house etiquette is fully deserved  
by a masonry as venerable as Job's.  
Or set aside Caïssa, patron saint of chess,  
and analyze the problem with your New York eye:  
first of all, these denizens have no other home;  
secondly, they're stolid and so dead a weight at  
night,  
one and two and three o'clock A. M. the time they're  
through,

he'd need a dozen wheelbarrows to cart them away;  
and where should he dump them? — down an alley  
or a sewer? —

devotees are lost if they ever touch the world;  
he'd grow a silly bankrupt if he even aired them out;  
last of all, they're old, older than patriarchs,  
older than the bible and as old as Israel;  
turn them out of doors, he'd be turning out his  
race;  
a gentile "goy" might do it, but you'll never see  
a Jew!

(If you care to test a creed,  
try Grand Street off the Bowery!)

Chess players squeeze out a mite of livelihood,  
squeeze each other for the stake, a nickel a game:  
twelve or thirteen hours buy one's coffee, one's  
doughnuts;  
satiety this against the hunger chessdom breeds:  
but —

you've got to be adroit enough and shrewd enough;  
scholarship won't do; you must have imagination;  
and then you'll need the third and hardest, only  
age can forge,  
courage to make the move you've felt your brain  
conceive:

but —

if you haven't got the brain to beat him, do it  
with your tongue;

scare him from the winning coup, sneak his thought  
elsewhere:

call him "potzer," "nebuch," "kibitz";  
if that trio don't confound him,  
sneer him "goy"; the weird vernacular  
has always this to addle Jews:

but —

if you haven't got the tongue to thwart him, do  
it with your beard;

unless your beard is long enough though, wait until  
it grows;

then let it wave across the field like a willow in the  
wind,

then hover near a corner like a broom that's done  
its day;

and when he blares "schachmatt" at you, you raise  
the elfin growth,

disclose a rook he couldn't see which makes off  
with his queen,

and twists the mate against him like a dagger in  
the dark!

(You sneer me, historian? —  
try Grand Street off the Bowery!)

Chess players vie in old damp basements,  
till some of them have nickels and some of them  
have none:

as long as some are still alive and only some are  
dead,

old damp basements are chess players' homes.  
When chess players die, they lay down their kings,  
do it with a noble touch, if they've learned the game  
at all:

for "a move's a move, you can never retract,"  
the mystic law from first to last, beginner up to  
peer!

Consider cross-eyed Spielmann who resigned two  
dawns ago;

Spielmann knew Caïssa's word; he'd played her  
eighty years:

played her as a boy when he won from Lilienkron,  
played her at the close when he lost to Lilienthal;  
played her through the way between from  
Rosenzweig to Ziegenschwarz, Kalinski to Rabino-  
witz;

and more than played her on that crag, the night  
he beat lame Steinitz,

little squatty champion for five and twenty years,  
Goliath of chessdom, till David Lasker brought him  
down!

It may have been an accident, Goliath fast  
asleep

from defeating all the masters and the tyros of this  
world —

but "Spielmann once beat Steinitz!" was the  
epitaph that dawn

as they stretched him on two tables for the first  
move to the grave:

“ a doddering duffer like Lilienthal beat Spielmann? —

Caïssa, our Caïssa, it was who queened that pawn!”

They dug their clinking nickels out of vests and  
up from trousers

to dig a checkered plot for Spielmann who beat  
Steinitz!

(No Potter's Field takes king or pawn  
from Grand Street off the Bowery!)



## MISS SAL'S MONOLOGUE

*To Mr. Bert Williams, the Mastersinger of  
Vaudeville*

Come, get up, Sal,  
peel off another,  
peel still another day  
off the calendar —

come, get along,  
peel them for noon-time —  
potatoes —  
peel them for night-time —  
potatoes —  
some folk like them for breakfast,  
peel some for breakfast —  
potatoes —  
slip your knife between their  
skin and flesh  
and mind, don't go slipping it  
between your own —  
potatoes —

if Mr. Columbus hadn't been what he was,  
had he been what you are, Sal,  
he'd never have felt the world round,  
he'd have felt it a

potato —  
 crooked and wrinkled,  
 never the same shape twice,  
 no shape at all,  
 full of bumps and crevices,  
 warts like mountain peaks —  
 no place for a man in his senses  
 to go crawling, exploring —  
 he'd have seen it what it is, a  
 potato,  
 and another,  
 and then another,  
 and then still another —  
 and he'd have stayed at home like you,  
 peeling,  
 peeling potatoes,  
 a potato peeling potatoes —  
 go, peel them off your back,  
 off your arms,  
 off your hips,  
 off your legs,  
 off your feet —  
 clothes —  
 clothes —  
 when you call me in the morning, Mr. Rooster,  
 don't call me Sal any more,  
 I don't know that name any more,  
 I don't answer to it any more,  
 somebody else whose name is Sal,

let her answer to it, mine isn't Sal —  
if you've got to get me up again, you call out,  
Potato —

go, peel them off the bed,

quilt,

counterpane,

sheet,

and get under and dream —

yes, be fooled a little more —

yes, I know you, Mr. Bed —

you're a nice soft fellow to lie with —

you and your spooky talk,

telling me your yarns

fit to turn a nigger white —

about potato goblins

coming and going on match-sticks for legs,

they doing the cake-walk,

me playing the tune —

“peel, Honey, I'm peeling off my heart for you,

so peel away your heart for me, do!”—

I told you, Mr. Rooster, never to call me again —

told you my name is Potato —

told you not to call out Sal any more —

told you to get up someone else by that  
name —

come, get up, Potato —

yes, that's me —

peel open your eyes —

yes, I'll peel —

come, peel off another,  
 still another to-day —  
 Mr. To-day, yes, I know —  
 don't have to tell me about you,  
 I know you, Man —  
 and yesterday,  
 and day before yesterday,  
 and day before day before yesterday,  
 and to-morrow,  
 and day after to-morrow,  
 and day after day after to-morrow —  
 your whole family, Mr. Man,  
 the whole of old Mr. Noah's ark of you  
 to-days —  
 and day after day after day after to-morrow,  
 when I die —  
 I know that too —  
 laid out, a skinned potato in a tub —  
 it being my to-day —  
 you can't tell me,  
 I know that they'll peel off some earth,  
 and stick me under,  
 and that'll be an end to peeling —  
 I know that too —  
 yes —  
 no — no —  
 not if the wind use the rain,  
 Mr. Wind use Mr. Rain

for still another knife  
to come peeling some more —  
oh Mr. Lord —  
oh good Mr. Lord —  
peel open your eye —  
peel Mr. Cloud off Mr. Sun  
before Mr. Wind bring Mr. Rain  
to come peeling me from under  
the skin of Mr. Sod —  
oh dear Mr. Lord —  
if they do, Mr. Lord —  
if they've got to, Mr. Lord —  
if they've got to get me up,  
it being my to-day —  
and you've got to call me,  
me that's used to being called —  
don't call out, Sal,  
just call out, Potato —  
whisper Mr. Gabriel to whisper,  
Potato —  
or I simply can't promise  
nobody,  
no-day,  
no-how —  
to peel the worms off my body,  
and the body off my soul!

## CROWNS AND CRONIES

### VISION

You have yet to attain  
    contemplation of a person  
without intervention of your own —  
    and so,  
you have not beheld your own.

You hold the glass,  
    face to you, back to him —  
not having felt  
    the earth hold its sea  
    sky-ward,  
    the sky hold its sun  
    earth-ward.

It needs  
    but a twist of reflection  
    to bring recognition around —  
but that needs  
    the titan-wrist  
    pulse of the earthquake  
    and pulse of the meteor  
of heredity  
and humility,

whose child is  
self-annihilation.

## CRONIES

You there,  
with a quill in space,  
stroke against time,  
scratch on the ball,  
    one-two-three:  
the ball revolves, yes,  
around another, yes,  
    and you then,  
quill, stroke, scratch,  
    one-two-three,  
vanish, yes,  
no space, no time,  
no ball, no you, no:  
    except in  
    me here,  
with a quill in space,  
stroke against time,  
scratch on the ball,  
    one-two-three,  
    so!

## INDOORS

On a day like this,  
when nobody dresses his outdoor best,

except some fop with a lady to woo  
(this time with wheedling of satin),  
when the bickering rain  
is satin enough  
for the sky to come wooing the earth  
(last time with streamers of sun-down) :  
on a day so dull,  
it is best for a man  
(this time with nothing to win, be the mood)  
to resign the game  
to dandies and skies  
and, sans advancement  
of earth's way or woman's,  
to go to the nook  
of some rhymester's book —  
providing his noise isn't tiresome, too,  
wooing Dame Art with démodé wiles.

## TO THE OTHERS

On, crusaders!  
Whither?  
Nowhere!  
The past?  
Sneers!  
Present?  
Snarls!  
Future?  
Snubs!  
Fodder?



Cocoanuts!  
Where?  
In trees!  
How?  
At your heads!  
Do?  
You!  
On, crusaders!

TO W. C. W. M. D.

There has been  
another death.  
This time,  
I bring it to you.  
You are kind,  
brutal,  
you know  
how to lower  
bodies.  
I ask only  
that the rope  
isn't silk,  
(silk doesn't break)  
nor thread,  
(thread does.)  
If it lifts  
and lowers  
common things,  
it will do.

## TO A SMALL SCULPTOR

Thought  
being  
in, not out —  
your eyes  
look  
in, not out —  
(they do,  
that's what scares me!)  
and though  
your  
body is small,  
the thought it holds  
is bigger than the moon —  
(it is,  
that scares me more!)  
now, if you  
could look  
out, not in —  
and could get  
me  
into your eyes,  
into your thought —  
(I'm small,  
though my  
hope is bigger than the moon!)  
and could  
get that  
thought into

your fingers,  
 and your fingers  
 in and out,  
 around and over the clay —  
 I'd  
 sit for you always —  
 (no, if  
 that could be —  
 that'd scare me most!)  
 I think I'll run away!

## GREEK OR PERHAPS ROMAN EPIGRAM

Cynthia  
 worked along the principle  
 of the annihilation of all  
 which doesn't contribute to the one-self,  
 the principle of hatred,  
 a biological principle;  
 Cleon,  
 along the principle  
 of the accumulation of all  
 which can possibly contribute to the all-self,  
 the principle of love,  
 a biological principle;  
 (the second  
 might be written first)  
 so the gods,  
 who work along the principle  
 of the annihilation of the all-but-one

and the accumulation of the all-for-one,  
 the principle of life,  
 the biological principle,  
 the gods parted them;  
 (the third, too,  
 might be written first)  
 especially  
 if you are a  
 Cynthia and Cleon  
 plus a penchant  
 for writing  
 Greek or perhaps  
 Roman epigrams  
 out of the sorrows  
 due to the arrows of  
 Juno and Jove —  
 or Jove and Juno —  
 whichever it is.

SCREEN DANCE: FOR RIHANI

Its posterior pushing  
 its long thin body,  
 a procession of waves lifting its head —  
 a green caterpillar:

Its roots digging and drinking,  
 the sap driving outward and up,  
 shaking its yellow head —  
 the mountain top of a tree:

Idling along in the blue,  
an easy white holiday,  
swimming away towards the rim of the bowl —  
a cloud:  
Dipping and twirling,  
soaring, floating, following after —  
a butterfly.

## TO WHITMAN

Monster!  
You would take me,  
tiny me,  
in your huge paws  
and scrunch me?  
Child!  
I can take you,  
tiny you,  
between my thumbs  
and love you.  
Come on!

## RED CHANT

There are veins in my body, Fenton Johnson —  
veins that sway and dance because of blood that is  
red;  
there are veins in your body, Fenton Johnson —  
veins that sway and dance because of blood that is  
red.  
Let a master prick me with his pin —

the bubble of blood shows red;  
Let a master prick you with his pin —  
the bubble of blood shows red.  
Let a woman love me,  
let a woman love you —  
the blood that rises is red.  
Let my gray eye turn to yours,  
let your brown eye turn to mine —  
the blood behind them is red.  
Let my skin wrinkle to a grin,  
let your skin wrinkle to a grin —  
red blood inspired the wrinkles.  
Let me think of a spirit,  
let you think of a spirit —  
the bodies that nourished the thought are red.  
Let me think of loving you,  
let you think of loving me —  
the hearts that nourished the thought are red.  
Let me say it as well — why shouldn't I? —  
let you say it as well — why shouldn't you? —  
the tongues that say it are red.  
Let me sing you a song — is it foolish? —  
let you sing me a song — is it foolish? —  
songs and singers are red.  
Let us go arm in arm down State Street —  
let them cry, the easily horrified:  
“ Gods of our fathers,  
look at the white man chumming with the black  
man!”

Let us nudge each other, you and I—  
without humility, without defiance:  
“We are red,” let us answer!

## THE NOBILITY

Behind blinking lids of banter,  
playing at butterfly,  
profundity digs his cave.  
Careless of her weak yellow gums,  
sorrow smiles like a toad,  
then snarls an insipid ditty.  
Not unruefully,  
the aged night trees raise their petticoats;  
their skinny white knees protrude  
and flirt with the fireflies.  
The earth snores in his sleep  
as the worms, squirming his brain,  
weave a nightmare of glee.  
For a noble breath or two,  
scorn is god. . . .

The river plays on, on his flute.  
The stupid mountains shrug their shoulders.  
The elephant moon goes, wagging his head.

## SELF-ESTEEM

I know a man  
who takes his art  
as he takes his coffee—

with a complacent lumping of sugar.  
He studies her  
as he does his neighbors —  
with more or less equal emotion.  
He doesn't grovel to her;  
nor does he fall to snivel worship.  
They fence with watchful wit  
and then put arms about each other;  
gravely, impersonally.  
I esteem this man beyond all others.

## POETRY

Ladislaw the critic  
is five feet six inches high,  
which means  
that his eyes  
are five feet two inches  
from the ground,  
which means,  
if you read him your poem,  
and his eyes lift to five feet  
and a trifle more than two inches,  
what you have done  
is Poetry —  
should his eyes remain  
at five feet two inches,  
you have perpetrated prose,  
and do his eyes stoop  
— which heaven forbid! —



the least trifle below  
five feet two inches,  
you  
are an unspeakable adjective.

## PATRIOT

This man bleeds  
for a tune  
the lightest wind  
can destroy from mortal ken.  
Out of himself,  
he has cut a reed —  
and into it,  
he breathes rhythms.  
What makes him blow,  
on a day when the clarion rules,  
is an imaginary nation,  
with one creed,  
and one language,  
and a ghost for queen,  
who pins him no praise when he dies —  
breathing rhythm to the last.

1914

PASTS

Science  
drove his plough,  
so straight,  
so strong,  
so true,  
deep and far  
into the past  
and turned it topsy-turvy.  
Now,  
we are frantically busy,  
with all of our many hands,  
sowing the next past.

CHRISTIANITY

When men  
stand men  
against trees  
to be shot  
: why don't they lift their arms out:  
: parallel with the earth and the sky:  
are traitors  
and deserters  
to a lesser

love to be  
deprived of  
this simple  
final comfort  
by traitors  
and deserters  
to a greater?

YOU THERE!

Hey there, you there,  
you of the skulking, round-shouldered eyes:  
Twist your eyes over here —  
give them a slap on the back so they turn —  
a jab in the ribs so they straighten —  
eh? no, don't put them in uniforms —  
this isn't a matter of dress-parade,  
of volunteers, conscription,  
but a matter of undress-parade,  
the moment for saluting the nude!  
Ah there — I knew you could do it — now:  
open the lips of your eyes —  
breathe the truth of your heart  
just once through your eyes —  
the truth in you, you have truth in you,  
the truth you breathe from one breath to another —  
breathe it forth from the crypt of you  
out through the mouth of your eyes —  
open them wider, wider, let the horizon hear!  
You dread your truth? —

then fling it out, kick it out —  
 one can't soil the seat of the pants of a truth —  
 give it a full-legged, bouncing kick —  
 or, as well if you must, breathe it out,  
 carefully, fastidiously, shameful phrase after  
 phrase —

breathe the truth of your heart  
 just once through your eyes!

Oh yes, I know —

we'll treat you like a poaching nigger —  
 burn you the way they did Joan of Arc —  
 poke your carcass with the boot of a lie  
 stronger than any truth of the ages —  
 and mouth frothing spit for your epitaph!  
 Eyes — shoulder arms — ready — take aim —  
 shoot us your truth just once from your depths:  
 shoot us the name of your country!

Eh? No! Humanity?

*Corporal!*

*Line up your firing squad!*

*That straight-bodied soul is a traitor!*

Hellow there, you there —

and Christ'll mouth open your eyes with a kiss!

#### THE NEXT DRINK

It's a marvelous age that we live in!

(It is, sir!)

In Greece, they fought with mere javelins and spears!

(Child's play!)

In later times — well, what of Bonaparte?

(Waterloo?)

And the poor pretty handful who fell?

(Tin soldiers!)

When you think of the motors and aeroplanes,

(The dreadnoughts!)

and the millions of men in the field at one time,

(Ten million dead!)

and the seas and the seas of bullets and blood!

(And the gold!)

Yes, the twenty-two millions a day that it costs!

(Vanderbilt's fortune!)

Why, we're right to be proud, sir, and happy and

gay!

(That we are!)

It's our duty, we should be, we should be!

(We should!)

Come, have the next drink on me!

#### CONJUGATION

. . . now, let you listen to:

killing folk

is still another way of

killing rats —

rats dying of feeding on festering wounds

containing poisoning resulting from firing —

or testing the sentence according to grammar —

an instructive experiment for the class —

if I err, let some scholar correct me —

the participle, killing,  
 is derived from the active verb,  
 infinitive, to kill,  
 the conjugation of which is,  
 kill, killed, killing, killed —  
 kill, the action of somebody firing,  
 killed, the action on somebody fired upon,  
 killing, the action on somebody else by somebody  
     fired upon,  
 killed, the action on somebody else by somebody fired  
     upon —  
 kill and killing standing in the active voice,  
 killed and killed in the passive:  
 now, let me hear —  
 since the theorem of it duplicates  
 the theorem of the verb, to kill —  
 I expect an accurate response —  
 let me hear your conjugation  
 of the verb, to feed, in the sentence,  
 feeding folk  
 is still another way of  
 feeding rats —  
 or rather, if you prefer it —  
 feeding rats  
 is still another way of  
 feeding folk —  
 the order of action is immaterial —  
 the conjugation, in either case, the same —  
 now, let me hear. . . .

## ROCOCO KINSMEN

My two old brothers are growing older.  
Soon they'll be hobbling to crutches or canes.  
My two blinking brothers are well-nigh blind.  
Soon I'll be leading them, they who lead me.

The heart, he says wistfully:

“What has become of that sprite,  
that child with the head of a crocus,  
folk used to call with a short pretty name?  
You recall how he ran to them, kicking a gigue?”

The head, he answers wistfully:

“I no longer see him, brother.  
He must have fallen in the storm last night.”

Wistfully, the heart:

“Who were the ones that buried him?  
Were they kind, can you say?”

Wistfully, the head:

“I do not know, brother.  
I hearkened a terrible curse.  
But it might have been the wind!”

Wistfully, the heart:

“Can we not beg from man to man?  
Some courteous sir might give us the tale?  
We'll sing him our rondel, and not ask a sou!”  
“It may be too late for our roundelay,  
it might sound old-fashioned,  
as dead as a dirge,”

wistfully, the head.

Wistfully, the heart:

“ We could lift our voices from plaintive to loud,  
and strike new crooked rhythms on timbal and  
lute? ”

“ New crooked rhythms might bring us an ear —  
your thought is jocund — let us try, ”

wistfully, the head.

Wistfully, the heart:

“ Let us ask this queer fellow to show us the mar-  
ket —

an errand like this — ”

“ An errand like this —  
must look innocent, cheerful — ”

wistfully, the head.

I answered quite wistfully, as wistfully as they:

“ I will try, ” I said.

My rococo kinsmen are stupid and slow.

If you must kill each other, can't you do it with-  
out hate?

They'd nod a little, bow low, caper and grin!

#### ARBOWS

Let the body of me quiver —

men shoot it at men —

an arrow at an arrow —

I an arrow, he an arrow —

he the other me! —



It will play boomerang —  
the soul of me  
meet the soul of me —  
touch, turn, shoot back,  
pierce the men who say, kill! —

Shoot bodies with hatred —  
the soul shoots back love! —  
God says so,  
each time He writes a new dawn!

NEED I SAY, WHERE?

My country  
doesn't hate  
people,  
but elements in people —  
my country'd kill these.  
Nay, my country'd  
take these  
to a place it knows,  
somewhere —  
need I say, where? —  
and have them  
playfully nurse,  
playfully nursed by,  
their kindred.  
Twins love twins.

## INITIALS

He goes along,  
in his thin flesh,  
narrow bones,  
slow blood,  
old hat,  
old clothes,  
old shoes,  
singing for love, battling for love.

He will go down,  
in thinner flesh,  
narrower bones,  
slower blood,  
older hat,  
older clothes,  
older shoes,  
battling for love, dying for love.

He will be put away,  
in a thin box,  
down a narrow slit,  
of the old earth,  
growing for love, rising for love:  
his initials carved  
on a thin seed,  
narrow seed,

slow seed,  
the carving as slow  
as he was slow,  
carving his K on a song.

WORD

When the old man in me  
tweaks the sleeve of the lad  
and whispers, "fine"  
if ever it comes,  
that is the word I'll bend to.



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